

Remembering Canon Giles Goward



The widespread and sad talk of death throughout last year might have had the effect of heightening our awareness of it or numbing us to it.

The clergy of the Archdiocese of Birmingham and family, friends and former parishioners of Canon Giles Goward will be truly shocked by his death in recent days.

Last Summer, Fr Giles - already a Pastoral Director at our Diocesan Seminary, St Mary's College, Oscott - was appointed Rector (Head) of the Seminary following Canon David Oakley's appointment as Bishop of Northampton.

Then, later on last year, he was appointed as a Canon of the Metropolitan Chapter of St Chad's Cathedral, together with the new Vicar General of the Archdiocese, Canon Richard Walker. Although both were full members of the Chapter of Canons by virtue of making their Profession of Faith and receiving their appointment as Canons, the ceremonial installation in the Cathedral has not been possible due to COVID restrictions.

Following his Ordination to the Priesthood at St Chad's Cathedral in July 1995, Canon Giles has ministered in the north and south of the Archdiocese: as Assistant Priest at Holy Trinity, Newcastle under Lyme; then as Archbishop's Secretary working with Archbishop Maurice and then Archbishop Vincent.

His first parish as Parish Priest was Our Lady, Queen of Peace in Worcester where he worked closely with the other parishes in the city.

Then, as Parish Priest of Our Lady & St Anne, Caversham in Reading, he served in one of the furthest points south in the Archdiocese of Birmingham. There he was a fellow priest to the clergy of the South Oxfordshire Deanery on the Birmingham side and a colleague and friend to the Reading clergy of the Portsmouth Diocese.

When in 2013 Fr Giles was appointed to the staff of the Seminary as a Pastoral Director and Director of the Permanent Diaconate Programme, he was asked what the parish of Caversham needed. He replied in simple terms: the parish just needs a parish priest. It's a long way from Birmingham but it's a normal parish that needs a priest.

Just last Summer, Fr Giles was appointed Rector of Oscott. It was a strange time to take over. The end of the 2019-20 formation year had finished with students fulfilling their lectures and other communications with the seminary online from parishes.

The current academic year began with the autumn term being lived in something of a bubble - the community stayed put for half term in October rather than compromising the immunity to COVID that had kept its members safe throughout. It was an intensive period of community living. That in

itself will have impacted greatly on Canon Giles' fellow staff, the support staff of the College and the students when they heard that he was taken ill just as term finished for Christmas.

The surprise for the wider diocesan family is keenly felt as Canon Giles was with us at the Cathedral for Ordinations in September and October and many people commented on how well he looked. On 1st December, he participated in an online meeting of the Cathedral Chapter and appeared well.

His non-COVID related death at the age of 55 brings with it the loss to Canon Giles' family, to the seminary community and to the Archdiocese of a much respected priest and a reminder to all of us of the gift of life that can be so fragile and a renewed invitation not to take life for granted.

Canon Giles had an active wit and was a very good mimic!

May he see the light on the face of Christ and be reunited with his parents in God's presence.

As this month, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, let us thank God for Canon Giles Goward's dedication to the Lord's service.

As we pray for him and commend him to the loving mercy of God, we pray now more than ever for vocations to the Priesthood and Diaconate.